

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN RARA ASMORO COMMUNITY: AN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IN SHADOW PUPPETRY PERFORMANCES

Latifa Ramonita¹; Rudi Sukandar^{2*}; Dewi Widowati³

¹⁻³Communication Studies, Faculty of Communication, LSPR Institute of Communication and Business
Jakarta, Indonesia 10220

¹ramonita.b@lspr.edu; ²rudi.s@lspr.edu; ³dewi.w@lspr.edu

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ABSTRACT

The research discussed that the woman dalang was still not considered equal to male ones in shadow puppetry performances despite being developed in the Mataram Kingdom era. Various reasons caused this phenomenon, such as the audience's preferences for men's dalangs. To respond to this condition, an all-women's karawitan community, Rara Asmoro, emerged in Surakarta to give support to many women who love wayang arts. This community sought to embrace these women's potential to then jointly promote and strengthen their skills in the field of Javanese art and culture. The research attempted to analyze the organizational culture formed in the Rara Asmoro community as an effort to empower women in the Javanese wayang art. The research applied a qualitative descriptive method to obtain a complete picture of the problem by interviewing the leader of Rara Asmoro and its four members. It finds a significance of the leader in empowering its members, fostering their confidence and talents, and expanding their opportunities for networking within the Wayang world. The dynamics of the organizational culture in the community allow everyone to switch roles: as a dalang, as a karawitan player, and as a singer, which opens opportunities for all members to have added value and skills. Conflicts are always resolved in a democratic and respectful manner, in which the leader keeps all of her members close as a family. However, internally, concertive control has not been fully implemented in the organization as it is still centralized on the leader.

Keywords: organizational culture, Rara Asmoro community, women's empowerment, shadow puppetry

INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment continues to be an issue mainstreamed by various parties, from the government and non-government institutions (Bahagijo et al., 2022; Khairunisa, Suryanti, & Wiratama, 2023; Siscawati et al., 2020). Many women-themed forums and activities are found to support the idea that women can no longer be viewed as secondary members of society. Indonesia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Retno L. P. Marsudi, in the webinar entitled *Empowered Indonesian Women Forward*, held by the Parliamentary Women's Caucus on Monday, 4 January 2021, underlines the important role of women. She, then in the event of the W20

Presidency of Indonesia Forum, held in Bali on 13-14 November 2022, specifically discusses the rejection of discrimination against women, encouraging the creation of gender equality, that is, creating equal opportunities and treatment in society, specifically in economy, education and training, healthcare and well-being, as well as opening up wider job opportunities for women with disabilities.

A similar message is conveyed at the first Women's Leadership Conference held by the Marriott Indonesia Business Council on 12-13 December 2022, and research that is presented at the 4th International Conference on Economics, Business, and Economic Education Science (Rinjani & Pertiwi, 2021),

where the strong role played by women as decision-makers, leaders, and innovators must be continuously encouraged and developed. Thus, the notion that women are weak and do not contribute to society is no longer relevant today. In Indonesia, for example, women currently can work in almost all sectors and jobs, even those that are previously dominated by men, such as being local and intercity public transportation drivers, heavy equipment operators in mining areas, political leaders, religious studies teachers, as well as those in the entertainment and arts industries (Subroto, Prawitasari, Handy, 2023; Susilo, Sugihartati, & Arimbi, 2019).

However, discrimination and gender inequality are still experienced by women, including in the entertainment industry and traditional arts and culture, such as Javanese *wayang kulit* (shadow puppetry) shows (Harianto & Ardiani, 2018; Ardiani, 2019; Ramonita et al., 2023). In a *wayang kulit* show, a puppeteer (*dalang*) plays an important position as he is the main attraction (Prayoga, 2018). *Dalangs*, not so different from pop stars and idols, have large fan bases, such as the late Ki Manteb Sudharsono, the late Ki Seno Nugroho, the late Asep Sunandar Sunarya, Ki Purbo Asmoro, and Ki Anom Suroto (Gono & Rakhmad, 2021; Nuryanto & Saepullah, 2020). If these big names appeared at a performance, it is certain that the venue would be filled to capacity. The play or the story itself could be secondary because any play performed by these top puppeteers will be considered to be interesting and exciting.

Despite being commonly perceived as a masculine profession, women becoming *dalangs* does not violate the cultural rules. Historically, many women have become *dalangs* since the Mataram Kingdom era (Asmorowati, personal communication, 2023; Sari, 2020). Currently, many women are interested in studying shadow puppetry, both formally at universities and informally within the family. However, they face many problems that hinder their motivation to study this art. Among the problems that women *dalangs* face is uncertainty about their future, as well as the audience's preferences and show organizers for men's *dalangs*.

This situation has also become critical due to unequal media exposure between male and female *dalangs*, the lack of *wayang kulit* performances since the COVID-19 pandemic, and decreased competitions and festivals for women *dalangs*. The uncertain future and income for these women *dalangs* eventually lead to despair so that, as a short-term solution, many of them are forced to switch professions to become *sindens* (singers), *pengrawit* (gamelan players), or art teachers in schools.

Departing from this situation and condition, Nyi Sri Harti Kenik Asmorowati, a professional woman *dalang* who is also the head of the study program and lecturer at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts (Institut Seni Indonesia/ISI Surakarta) in the Pedalangan Study Program, is motivated to establish the "Rara Asmoro", an all-women *karawitan* community, officially in

2010. This is quite unique since the *karawitan* or *wayang kulit* community is usually not exclusive to men or women.

This *karawitan* community consists of women only, and its aim is to empower women to be active in Javanese *wayang* performing arts. Its members are drawn from various regions; most are ISI graduates and/or active students. Based on this background, this study attempted to understand how the organizational culture is formed within the Rara Asmoro community and to uncover their activities to encourage women's empowerment in Javanese *wayang* art.

The involvement of women in Indonesian traditional art, commonly labeled as men-dominated occupation, has become the focus of several studies. First, Wirandi and Sukman (2022) have discussed the existence and role of women in the Becanang tradition, musical instruments made of bronze, in Bener Meriah, Aceh, where the players are women amid traditional and religious values in Aceh, which are dominated by men. In another, the participation of women in cultural arts whose people have a very traditional and religious lifestyle can also be seen in Dikia Baruda's performance in Nagari Andaleh Baruh Bukit, Sungayang district, Tanah Datar regency, West Sumatra. It is accepted as a medium for establishing family relationships and friendships with fellow community members (Saputra, Syafniati, & Zulfahmi, 2022).

Further, research is conducted on women's role in preserving the Slangit Mask Dance from Cirebon (Alfarisi, 2022). Historically, this dance was performed as a strategic method in spreading the religion of Islam by Sunan Gunung Jati back in the 1400s. One of the actors behind the religious diffusion by the mask dance is a woman named Nyi Mas Gandasari. The research shows that women can make many contributions to society, especially in preserving the Slangit Mask dance. Another research focuses on male and female segregation through the traditional art of *Kenthongan*—musical instruments made from bamboo from Banyumas, Central Java (Febriani, 2021). *Kenthongan* is perceived as a masculine musical instrument, and women are perceived as only complementary objects in *kenthongan* music performances. Further, Sukesu (2022) has studied the creation and performance by women in *karawitan*. Women, in the position of *sindens* in *wayang* art are often considered as stage decoration. This research shows that *sindens* provide an important factor in a *wayang* dramaturgy as they can create responsive and creative ideas through song composition.

The research attempts to fill in a research gap on how women, through a community, can empower themselves in the field of traditional arts and culture, specifically in traditional Javanese puppetry. Using Rara Asmoro as a case, the research attempts to reveal the organizational culture that forms in the community as a reference and learning case for similar communities in their efforts to reduce discrimination and negative stigma in society. As an

organization, as rules that directly affect the behavior of its members, certain expectations should also be considered in Rara Asmoro. This relates to actions implemented by members of the organization in their daily work environment, which then is embedded in the organizational culture to be applied in work or activities within the organization.

The reference to organizational culture is crucial to describe the phenomenon being studied. Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1983) have stated that organizations are best understood using a cultural lens. In the context of Rara Asmoro, the women's community is developed in Indonesia under the Javanese culture, which has a patriarchal social structure (Dewi, 2019; Mawaddah, Suyitno, & Suhita, 2021). Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo then have stated that culture is a way of life in an organization, including climate or atmosphere, both emotional and psychological. This is reflected by how members of the organization perceive that they are an inseparable unit and support each other. This improves employee morale, attitudes, and productivity levels. All the symbols within an organization, such as actions, routines, conversations, and the meanings that people attach to these symbols, are also included in an organizational culture. Thus, the meaning and understanding of culture is achieved through interactions that occur between employees and management (Gularso & Subekti, 2023; Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983; Wirawan, 2021).

Many scholars from a diverse range of disciplines have offered definitions of what organizational culture is. However, if asked about this, managers and employees would say it is, "How we do things around here" (Gutterman, 2020). Culture is something that has been accepted in social life and adopted by individuals over extended periods as they form social groups such as organizations, tribes, and communities as well (Bolat & Korkmaz, 2021). A similar opinion is expressed by Robbins and Judge (2013), who explain that organizational culture refers to a system of shared meaning held by members that distinguishes the organization from other organizations. With a strong culture, an organization's goals can be achieved more effectively, but on the contrary, a weak organizational culture will hinder the goals of the organization itself.

Furthermore, Robbins and Judge (2013) have mentioned seven key essential characteristics of an organization's culture. The characteristics are (1) Innovation and risk-taking, the degree to which employees are encouraged to be innovative and take risks; (2) Attention to detail, described as the degree to which employees are expected to exhibit precision, analysis, and attention to detail; (3) Outcome orientation, the degree to which management focuses on results or outcomes rather than the techniques and processes used to achieve them; (4) People orientation, defined as the degree to which management decisions take into consideration the effect of outcomes on people within the organization; (5) Team orientation, focusing on the degree to which work activities are

organized around teams rather than individuals; (6) Aggressiveness, that is the degree to which people are aggressive and competitive rather than easygoing, and (7) Stability, which is the degree to which organizational activities emphasize maintaining the status quo in contrast to growth (Robbins & Judge, 2013).

While the organizational communication perspective is adequate in analyzing phenomena in organizations, given the specific issue of women being the focus of the research, the critical perspective needs to be taken into account. These perspectives share different attempts to connect concerns of meaning, identity, and discourse processes with power and resistance (Mumby, 2016). Further, the issues related to power, hegemony, and concertive control also need to be addressed in discussing organizational communication from critical perspectives Modaff & Butler (2021).

In addition, the research also utilizes Moran, Mernin, and Gibbs' (2017) model of empowerment as an analytical tool. The empowerment model is designed to equip every group member with skills, knowledge, and appropriate attitudes. This model has three unique elements: programming, support, and training. Although each element plays an essential role in each participant's success, the interaction of these elements facilitates successful participation and true empowerment (Puspitasari et al., 2022).

Further, Moran, Mernin, and Gibbs (2017) have explained that programming, being the first element, is described as the 'continuum of opportunity'. A community should recognize the value of providing various options that align with peoples' current competencies, including their physical, cognitive, and social abilities. This range of choices gives participants the power to pick the program that best suits their skills, facilitating successful involvement.

The second element of the model is support, which is referred to as 'helping hands' (Moran, Mernin, & Gibbs, 2017). This element recognizes that there is a need for assistance, whether it comes from the participant directly, is requested by the parent or legal guardian, or is provided by the teacher or organization. The model considers three key parts of support: identifying the people who need help, defining the kind of support required, and figuring out the required level of skill. The third element of the model is training, referred to as 'strategies of success' (SOS) (Moran, Mernin, & Gibbs, 2017). A variety of training modules are available through the training component, some of which are still being created. These modules are designed to give teachers and/or helpers the knowledge and skills they need in order to successfully facilitate everyone's involvement in programming.

In terms of empowerment outcomes, six intended outcomes are identified (Sadan, 1997): (1) The journey toward empowerment frequently gets off to a frustrating start; (2) To enable such advancement, there must be a foundational level of capability, resources,

and societal support; (3) People get empowered when they show a desire to get resources and ways to improve their skills in order to achieve certain life goals; (4) It appears as people acknowledge their right to express their aspirations and their ability to define them; (5) Collective efficacy, in which the community successfully organizes itself for collaborative efforts to achieve desired outcomes in their environment, results when individual self-efficacy extends to the larger community; (6) The ability to successfully mobilize resources to continue the empowerment process, including the learning of community forming and management skills. According to Sadan (1997), those outcomes can be achieved through controlling their lives, participating in decision-making, and influencing the environment.

The empowerment model relates closely to the research, which focuses on the empowerment of women in the *wayang kulit* community. To be specific, it connects to the external problems they face, such as being considered not as strong as men, the preferences of the audience and event organizers to men *dalangs*, and skepticism about the ability of women *dalangs* in performing *wayang*. Simultaneously, they also face internal problems, such as concerns among the women's *dalangs* about their future, which creates heavy obstacles for them to develop their potential (Ramonita et al., 2023).

However, considering the mandate in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this issue falls under the gender equality goal, especially equal opportunities between men and women in the fulfillment of their rights and obligations (Dwiastuti et al., 2022; Judiasih, 2022; Larashati, 2022). Through women's empowerment activities, consistent efforts have been recognized to build capacity, motivation, and raise awareness of the women's potential. This is exemplified by the efforts of the Rara Asmoro *karawitan* community, which focuses on the development of skills, knowledge, education, and capacity building of its members.

METHODS

The research applies a qualitative descriptive research method to explore a problem and develop a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The research design is ideal for exploring the dynamics and experiences within a women-only organization. Drawing from a feminist perspective, which emphasizes the importance of the subjective and experiential in understanding women's realities, this design would facilitate a nuanced exploration of how organizational practices impact its members (Acker, 1990; Harding, 1987).

Rara Asmoro is chosen as the case of this research as recommended by two senior male *dalangs* in Jogjakarta. The data collection procedure is carried out through in-depth interviews with five relevant informants, namely the Rara Asmoro *karawitan*

community leader and members in Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia. The primary informants of the research are Nyi Sri Harti Kenik Asmorowati as the founder of the Rara Asmoro community, Ni Seruni Widaningrum and Ni Seruni Widawati, twin women *dalangs* and members of the Rara Asmoro community since 2016, and have been Asmorowati's '*lurahs*' or assistants. Two other members are Selvi Tri Hapsari (who joined Rara Asmoro in 2013) and Rizki Ananda Utami (who joined Rara Asmoro in 2015).

Secondary data are obtained through other sources, such as media reports and documents, to support the primary data. The supporting data are collected from various news broadcasts on several reputable news web pages and video content broadcasts on the Javanese *wayang* performance themed in YouTube, both from official channels and from other credible *wayang* community channels.

Thematic analysis is used in the data analysis process, emphasizing finding and analyzing patterns or themes pertaining to power dynamics, gender dynamics, and organizational culture. In order to guarantee a comprehensive examination of data across various participant experiences, the analysis is reflexive and iterative and use ongoing comparison techniques (Charmaz, 2014). Feminist viewpoint theory, which promotes beginning the research from the perspectives of women and other marginalized groups, also informs the analysis (Smith, 2012).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

According to Asmorowati, the initiator of Rara Asmoro, the initial concept to establish this community was developed in 2006 when she received an offer to perform a *wayang kulit* play in the Kartini Day celebration in Jakarta. At that time, one of the VIP guests who attended the event was the Indonesian State Minister for Women's Empowerment, Prof. Dr. Meutia Hatta. She suggested that all of the musical instruments should be played by women, accompanying her as the *dalang*. Departing from the success of this performance, Asmorowati began to think more seriously about forming a more solid *karawitan* group, especially when there was a plan to win a MURI record for *wayang kulit* performances initiated by RRI (Radio of the Republic of Indonesia) in Semarang. The MURI record that would be granted was for the performance of five women *dalangs* from five different age groups. Apart from that, all the event's 'committee members and the *pengrawit* (*karawitan* musicians) must be women as well to show that these women are skillful musicians and wayang experts, apart from just entertainment purposes. Asmorowati immediately tried to gather suitable personnel, not only from the ISI students, but also from other regions, such as *karawitan* players from Wonogiri and Klaten (Asmorowati, personal communication, June 1, 2023).

After the successful event, Asmorowati felt even more confident about forming a *karawitan* community

with only female members. It should have an official name with members having musical abilities not only relying on intuition and *kupingan* (ear sensitivity) when playing *gamelan*, but also a comprehensive background in musical notes and *wayang*. The name 'Rara Asmoro' was finally selected by Asmorowati as the official name for this *karawitan* community in December 2010, when she had to perform at the Mother's Day celebration held by the Central Java Cultural Park (TBJT) in Surakarta. The rationales behind this name were, among others, putting forward the woman figures having a name in accordance with the Javanese language ('*Rara*' and '*Asmoro*'). In addition, the word '*Asmoro*' was taken from Asmorowati's name herself, which means 'woman in love'.

To make Rara Asmoro even more legitimate as a *karawitan* community, Asmorowati immediately prepared its unique identities, one of which was Rara Asmoro's Marching Tune. This tune is needed, especially during the closing of the performance. When the *kayon* or *gunungan*, a *wayang* object in the shape of a mountain symbolizing the world, closes, the tune will be played. The showing of *kayon* itself appears as a marker of the beginning of a *wayang* performance, a sign of story acts, as well as the ending of a story (Perasutiyo, Muchyidin, & Nursupriana, 2022). In addition, the Rara Asmoro Marching Tune can also be played when the *wayangs* are handed over to the *dalang*, before the *talun* (a music concert held before the *wayang* show) begins (Asmorowati, personal communication, June 1, 2023).

In accordance with the spirit of women's empowerment that underlies the formation of Rara Asmoro, the lyrics in Rara Asmoro Marching Tune also convey the message of empowerment, for example, "*Wanita wus siyaga, anggelar ringgit purwa*" (We women are ready to start the show) and "*Dadi kaca benggala, tumrap wanita*" (Becoming a good example for other women).

In recruiting its members, Rara Asmoro also focuses on Indonesian Institute of Arts (Institut Seni Indonesia-ISI) students. Asmorowati prefers involving ISI students majoring in Pedalangan (*wayang* performance) and *Karawitan* (*gamelan* musical instruments), especially those who are still active as students and/or their alumni. According to her, recruiting senior or traditional *karawitan* players is not preferable for several reasons. First, they are often confused when reading music sheets because their musical skills are based on intuition in a classical style. Second, when performing musical arrangements in a modern style where the beat varies, their musical performance becomes disharmonized due to their training. Therefore, the group needs to rehearse many times, sometimes up to twenty times, to ensure the quality of the music and performance. Another consideration when recruiting those from ISI is that they are relatively more skilled at various roles such as *sinden* (singer), *gamelan* player, and *dalang*.

Other informants, Hapsari and Utami, confirm

the fact. They are members of Rara Asmoro who have a background as *sinden* and *karawitan* players. Widaningrum and Widawati, or the *dalang* twins, also affirm that in Rara Asmoro, they could also play a role as *karawitan* players instead of being the *dalangs* all the time. This allows all members, including Asmorowati herself, to switch positions to play various *gamelan* instruments, such as *demung*, *gong*, *suling*, *gender*, *kendhang*, et cetera.

Furthermore, in a *karawitan* performance, not only can the exchange of tasks within the community occur, but also that of personnel between communities. All Rara Asmoro members have the freedom to join other *karawitan* communities with the approval of their leaders. Informants Widaningrum and Widawati have stated that they have performed with other *karawitan* communities, such as Amarta, Rangga Rajasa, Sang Pamarta, Laras Hapsari, and also Wayang Wahyu. According to Widaningrum, "We also had the chance to join the church-wayang community, where many of the members are Catholic *dalangs*."

Although the members do not use the Rara Asmoro brand, Asmorowati supports and accompanies them to ensure that the situation and conditions are kept under control. According to Asmorowati's statement, she is usually involved, even from the preparation process to the D-day. She is also willing to lend her equipment and would be present on the day of the show to encourage the members.

In terms of organizational structure, the Rara Asmoro *karawitan* community utilizes a simple hierarchy of two levels: a leader and members. One or two members are appointed by the *dalangs* to be their assistants or *lurah*. According to Hapsari, who has joined Rara Asmoro since 2013, *lurah* is responsible for calling the members, scheduling a practice, and ensuring all members are available on show dates. This proves to be crucial to cater the demands of *karawitan* shows, which consist of two types of performances: a *wayang* performance (*wayang kulit*, *wayang orang*, or other types of *wayang* shows) and a concert (the playing of instruments by the musical section and singing of songs by the *sindens*).

An interesting finding emerges about the two types of performances brought by the *karawitan* group. When accompanying a *wayang* performance, for example, *wayang kulit*, the rhythm of the music and accompaniment must follow the *dalang's* direction. The *dalang* uses certain types of codes, such as *dhodhogan* (a term taken from the root 'dhog', which refers to the sound produced by iron or wood that is pounded by hand on *kothak* or the *dalang's* box) and *keprakan* (a term derived from the essential word '*keprak*', which refers to the sounds produced from the iron plates pounded by *dalang's* feet, using *cempala*, an instrument made of iron or wood) (Sukistono, 2022). In a war scene, for example, the music would be fast, loud, and uplifting, while in a romance or tragedy scene, the music would be slower, softer, and more seductive. However, it is different when the *karawitan* group performs in a concert; the code or direction

comes from *pengendangor* percussionists.

This strategy is deliberately designed by Asmorowati to increase the skills and values of its members. Each member is encouraged to try something new. Asmorowati has stated, “Although in the *Karawitan* department, they received musical and singing lessons, in *wayang* performances, there are specific knowledge and techniques that need to be learned, like the codes from the *dalang*. I want my members to be creative and innovative so we can be different from other *karawitan* communities.” This innovation displays the community’s willingness to differentiate them from other male-led/-dominated *karawitan* groups.

In accordance with the characteristics of organizational culture (Robbins & Judge, 2013), the first characteristic is innovation and risk-taking, that is, the degree to which employees are encouraged to be innovative and take risks. All the informants agree that each member of Rara Asmoro is encouraged to try new skills, for example, trying a different *karawitan* style or learning how to play new *gamelan* instruments to give a fresh performance to the audience. One of the informants, Hapsari has stated, “In this community, we are trained to have more confidence. For example, when I first joined Rara Asmoro, I could not play the flute. Then Mbak Kenik (Asmorowati) challenged me to try playing it since in our *gamelan* troupe, we did not have a flute player. Then, willingly, I took the challenge. I tried to practice it independently. After some time, we performed the show with the flute as an additional musical instrument.”

In Rara Asmoro, skill development is applied fairly, not exclusively. Hapsari has added that “Mbak Kenik also asked other members to play new instruments or challenge us to play new musical arrangements such as *Sragenan* style (a type of *gamelan* musical arrangements that is typically played in Sragen, a city in Central Java), and many more.”

Asmorowati has agreed that it is not easy to push her members to be more active and confident as newbies tend to have a lack of confidence and doubt their abilities. Knowing every member’s ability, Asmorowati has explained, “I never forced them to do anything they did not want. I let them play any musical instruments that they feel comfortable with. I want to make sure they are mentally ready to go on stage. Sometimes, independently, they are good. But when they need to play the *gamelan* harmoniously, it becomes a problem. While playing the *gamelan*, *nyerekali iromo* (harmony) is the key.” As mentioned by Gibbs, Czepiel, and Egermann (2023), it is mandatory that *gamelan* requires all instruments to work harmoniously, allowing for the potential occurrences of shared interactive flow or group flow, and the native equivalent, *ngeli*, meaning to float together.

It is important to understand that the need for improvisation is very high in *wayang* and *karawitan* performances. Between performances, there is usually an entertainment session that can be filled in by guest

stars, as well as reading out requests from the audience. The audience may ask the *karawitan* troupe to play certain songs they like and leave messages or greetings. Usually, while making a request, the audience will also slip a *sawer* or some tip money for one of the players or for the *dalang*. Utami and Hapsari have said that once they do not prepare to play one particular song that is requested by an audience. As they seem very puzzled, Asmorowati then orders them to open their music books on stage. However, Hapsari has said that when the songs are not in their repertoire, as a form of respect and service to the audience, they will try to play them intuitively. In some cases, a member will browse the musical notes from the Internet, take photos, then share them as quickly as possible through their WhatsApp Group.

With such a great commitment from the *dalang* to the audience and for the sake of presenting the best performance, it turns out that Asmorowati has a special way to overcome the problem of improvisation that needs to be done on stage. As Hapsari said, in every show, the *dalang* always prepares an ‘*ingkung*’, that is, a male *pengrawit* standby behind the stage, who will send music codes to the ladies from the side or quietly join the group when they are having trouble.

The second characteristic in Robbins’ organizational culture is attention to detail, described as the degree to which employees are expected to exhibit precision, analysis, and attention to detail. It is undeniable that in the *wayang* performance system, the *dalang* is in control of all things: the performance, story development, musical arrangements, and song composition, including directly monitoring the members and the dynamics within the community, up to the distribution of fees and group’s cash flow. In short, the *dalang* is the show manager, human resource manager, and the finance manager. In Rara Asmoro, Asmorowati is in charge of everything and always prepares in detail.

Other details in Rara Asmoro, although they are not considered rules, are specific criteria for joining the group. Widaningrum has explained, “You must be a woman. You must be able to play *gamelan*. It is okay not to have experience in *wayang* performance. Mrs. Kenik usually seeks someone who is capable or has potential. She will immediately invite anyone to join the community.”

Because the Javanese arts and *karawitan* community are not big, *dalangs* usually can see emerging potentials, for example, from various *wayang* performances or social media. As explained by Widaningrum and Widawati, both were invited to join by Asmorowati when they were still seniors at SMKI (The Indonesian Karawitan Middle School) in 2016 after contacting each other via Facebook.

The third characteristic is outcome orientation, which refers to the degree to which management focuses on results or outcomes rather than the techniques and processes used to achieve them. The fourth is people orientation, which is defined as the degree to which management decisions take into

consideration the effect of outcomes on people within the organization. The fifth is team orientation, which focuses on the degree to which work activities are organized around teams rather than individuals. In Rara Asmoro, members are not considered separately in their respective professions but are regarded as one unit, as explained in the previous section. Each member can have various duties and responsibilities because they have many skills. For example, Hapsari and Utami, who graduated from Karawitan and are good as *sindens*, can show their skills in other fields. Likewise, Widaningrum and Widawati whose main identities are women *dalangs*, are also good at playing the *gamelan* and *kendhang*.

In Rara Asmoro, which has the goal of embracing women's potential to be more confident and skilled in *wayang* art, Asmorowati puts more emphasis on the processes carried out by the members to achieve the best results. Based on the statements given by the members, Asmorowati often challenges them to try new things but not as coercion. According to Widawati, challenges or new things that are given must be put into practice as soon as possible, so that on the D-day they can already master it.

From these statements, it is obvious that in the Rara Asmoro *karawitan* community, group work activities are emphasized more than individual work. Although the leader is the main decision-maker in work activities, Asmorowati cannot be alone because her performance must be supported by the *pengrawit*, who must be harmonious. This condition also shows unit integration within Rara Asmoro, in which all units within the organization are conditioned to operate together.

Based on the information from all sources, Asmorowati never gives punishment for violations or mistakes committed by members, although as a joke, Asmorowati sometimes says that she would cut the fees if they make mistakes or are not perfect in appearance. However, in reality, she never does that. Even when there is an incident where a member sleeps on stage during a performance, Asmorowati does not respond emotionally. Uniquely, although several informants feel that the person's behavior has crossed the line and violates decency norms, Asmorowati, as the group leader, has different considerations. As a solution to the problem, she chooses to talk to the troubled member in private. All informants agree that there has never been a member who has been dismissed or fired from Rara Asmoro, although resignations due to personal reasons occur.

Until 2023, the number of active members of Rara Asmoro is 25-30 people. All informants agree that the comfortable and enjoyable situation in the community makes them almost never experience major conflicts among the members. Difficulties experienced by junior members, for example in terms of mastering musical instruments and performance, will be assisted by senior members. Everybody can give critiques and suggestions, from leaders to members, as well as from members to leaders, because all of them have the goal

of wanting to give the best performance.

The next characteristic is stability, which is the degree to which organizational activities emphasize maintaining the status quo in contrast to growth. The effort to keep the show going smoothly is shown by Asmorowati, especially in the rewarding system: how much reward is allocated according to employee performance, compared to allocation based on seniority, favoritism, or other non-performance factors. Asmorowati, as the leader who has full control over the distribution of rewards, admits that there are quite striking differences between the situation in the world of *wayang* performances before and after the pandemic. Asmorowati has stated that before the pandemic, the benchmark was the *sindens*, followed by the percussion players and other players proportionally. Then, there will be extra for the *lurahs* as they use their mobile phones to call everybody.

Unfortunately, all situations have changed after the pandemic. Asmorowati has explained, "I usually tell Wida and Wati about this: 'There is only this amount of money as our fee, what do you think?' The answer is, 'It's okay, Ma'am, let us consider this show as our practice session'" (Asmorowati, personal communication, June 1, 2023).

Although the pandemic is now over, the damage from the health crisis has proven to be difficult to restore. According to Asmorowati, "We as Javanese artists are currently *thimik-thimik* (crawling), trying to return the situation to how it was before" (Asmorowati, personal communication, June 1, 2023).

Furthermore, Asmorowati has stated that in Rara Asmoro, the amount of money paid is not really determined by seniority. However, if the junior member shows quality and potential, extra compensation will be taken into account. The interesting thing is that all members agree that they never ask each other about the amount of fees they get. Hapsari has said, "Fees have never been a problem between us. It's not about the money, but more about the get-togethers." Agreeing with Hapsari's claim, Utami has said they would be happy regardless of the amount of the rewards as they focus more on their togetherness.

In Rara Asmoro, the leader's supervision and response are very extensive, especially when it comes to providing service to the audience and the event owner. However, when confronted with Robbins and Judge's (2013) next characteristic, i.e., aggressiveness (the degree to which people are aggressive and competitive rather than easygoing), Rara Asmoro is not so much showing an aggressive working environment but is more about comfort and a happy group. As explained in the previous section, Rara Asmoro members have the freedom to join other *karawitan* communities as long as they do not clash with the performances agreed upon by Rara Asmoro. Asmorowati is also very concerned about the condition of the members, even when members are performing with other communities or when Rara Asmoro is performing with other *dalangs*.

However, in the Rara Asmoro community, not

many rules are officially imposed on members. Both Asmorowati and other informants agree that Rara Asmoro only has one rule: being on time because the members have the habit of tardiness. As the leader, Asmorowati always gives a tolerance for tardiness of 5-10 minutes. Members must notify her via the WhatsApp group when they will be late, as any delay will hinder the work of other members.

In other critical situations, for example, when something goes wrong while performing, Asmorowati usually turns the situation into a joke. When the *goro-goro* (interlude) stage begins, Asmorowati makes satirical dialogues, not to corner people who made mistakes but simply as a joke. Uniquely, when this is the case, such satire would provoke the other members to respond with other humor. Hapsari adds that this creates a much more and warmer stage atmosphere.

Internally, in terms of power, concertive control (Modaff & Butler, 2021) has not been fully implemented in the organization, as control is still centralized on the leader. Therefore, this participatory organizational phenomenon, a characteristic of team-based management that promotes a strong feeling of ownership and shared power among the members, is still a work in progress.

In correlation with the empowerment process inside the community, following Moran, Mernin, and Gibbs' (2017) model, it appears that the organizational culture carried out by Rara Asmoro has reflected the three elements: programming, training, and support. In Rara Asmoro, though Asmorowati has prepared some programs and preparations, she is very open to ideas and creativity that members bring up. With the position of *lurah*, Asmorowati delegates some work to trusted members so that her work will be lighter. In addition, the closeness between members allows for the creation of self-control because members have the opportunity to help each other in rehearsing performances.

With the goal of empowering its members to become agile and resilient women, Asmorowati, from the start, develops a sense of trust between leaders and members. Asmorowati is always open to discussion with members about the details of the performance, as well as the development of plays, music, and songs. In addition, by considering the need for performance preparation, Asmorowati always calculates the rehearsal time and equipment the members need. Asmorowati has stated, "I have calculated all the budget. I can tell if the members are not ready, they can't just practice twice. Financial management is also my responsibility." (Asmorowati, personal communication, June 1, 2023).

Trust is also formed among the members, as seen by the members feeling comfortable in the Rara Asmoro community, not debating the amount of compensation, in point of fact that they are willingly prioritizing Rara Asmoro if there is a concurrent job offer. Hapsari has said that the closeness within the community makes them believe they are a family. Utami also adds a similar answer that when she has

other offers, she will choose Rara Asmoro first.

To encourage a successful empowerment process, leaders must develop self-confidence in members through training and drills. Asmorowati does this by giving various challenges to its members to be more courageous in developing their skills and improving their performance. However, Asmorowati realizes that encouraging her members to be more active and self-confident is not easy. Asmorowati states, "I will let them play what they want, then encourage them to develop their ability. Sometimes, they are good individually, but in *karawitan*, harmony is the key." In order to keep the community solid and provide good-quality performances, Asmorowati develops a comfortable work environment where everyone can participate happily. As a leader, Asmorowati knows when to be firm and when to be more relaxed.

Furthermore, as a support, Asmorowati consistently provides opportunities for members to practice and develop their skills, clear instructions, and the necessary assistance to complete members' work properly. Although no evaluation activity is carried out formally and is scheduled periodically, leaders and members discuss each other freely regarding their performance and admit that there are parts that are less than perfect.

To strengthen the empowerment process, the leader and members must communicate well to develop a sense of mutual understanding and respect. From the results of the interviews with the informants, it is very clear that the members really respect Asmorowati as the leader. As stated by Widawati, "We are very close. We are a family. Even with our leader, we feel like friends, like sisters, we are equal. In this community, we feel free and closer to each other emotionally."

In addition, to broaden members' perspectives, they are allowed to learn from other communities. According to Asmorowati, other communities actually have the same *wayang* personnel, but maybe the line-up is mixed with male *karawitan* players or accompanying other *dalangs*. Asmorowati does not doubt the commitment of her members because, basically, Rara Asmorowati does not apply closed management or restrain its members.

Furthermore, related to women's empowerment efforts carried out by Asmorowati through Rara Asmoro, messages about women's empowerment are consistently conveyed, both those implied by the play or the *wayang* characters that are performed, also delivered directly in the form of dialogue. According to Asmorowati, she is very much disturbed when female characters are positioned as the object of the jokes, which, in the end, undermines women. According to Asmorowati, "One thing on my mind: let's empower ourselves. Women can excel at anything if they want to. That is the reason why I am consistently developing *wayang* stories that have female characters as the center point. I don't care whether anyone will recognize and consider my mission seriously. This is who I am."

Widawati believes that the message of

women's empowerment is consistently delivered by Asmorowati in her performances. Widaningrum adds that before entering the interlude scene, the narrative of women's empowerment is usually delivered by Asmorowati in the form of three pieces of advice, in the form of *wangsalan* (repetition of rhymes): women must be resilient, never give up easily, and should not feel inferior.

A similar opinion is also expressed by Hapsari, who has stated that women's empowerment narrative in *wayang* performance is the iconic part of Asmorowati, which translated into stories that have women as main characters, such as Srikandi, Dewi Ambo, Drupadi, Dewi Kunti, and many more. Furthermore, Hapsari states that the message of gender equality is narrated by Asmorowati throughout the story, as in performance and group practice, then the statement will be reinforced by the male and female guest stars who are invited to the stage. The guest stars can also show their appreciation to members of Rara Asmoro who are playing *karawitan* as the latter supported the former's task.

To be able to fully understand the situation in the *wayang* community, particularly in Rara Asmoro, in spreading the message of women's empowerment, not only they must study the empowerment process in the community itself but also the intended outcomes of this empowerment process (Sadan, 1997). However, one needs to understand that the dynamics in an art community are quite different from that in a corporation or formal organization. Especially in the Javanese traditional art community, the root of Javanese culture, which is patriarchal, is very dominant. Therefore, it is not easily changed.

Further, the empowerment process, in most cases, begins with a sense of frustration. Asmorowati herself has mentioned that she finally decides to form Rara Asmoro since she sees the limitations for women's careers, women *dalangs*, in *wayang kulit* performing arts compared to men. Their career journey is still not as strong as men's. Not to forget the preferences of the audience and event organizers, skepticism about the ability of women *dalangs* in performing *wayang* by some members of the society, as well as the concerns of women *dalangs* themselves about their future are also creating heavy obstacles for them to develop their potential. Therefore, the women's *wayang* community needs to be encouraged and strengthened.

Sadan's (1997) second point has mentioned that for the empowerment process to be able to develop, it is important to have a minimal level of ability and resources; Rara Asmoro has both of them. Asmorowati always seeks new potentials to keep Rara Asmoro strong. It does not matter if some of her members are still at junior level in education or skill, as this group will go hand in hand to increase their ability to play the musical instruments, learn how to play the *wayangs* and build their self-confidence.

When empowerment begins, as mentioned in the third point of Sadan's (1997) intended outcomes, Rara Asmoro continuously develops the ability to

achieve something in their life: a prospective career in *wayang kulit* arts, stability, and something to be proud of. And of course, then the fourth point of Sadan's outcome, that is people's recognition of their right to express aspirations and their ability to define them is an outcome of developing a critical consciousness of the existing situation, will also be fulfilled.

Although Rara Asmoro and other women's *karawitan* communities are not considered oppressed by men, it is necessary to have an in-depth understanding of how women are still becoming the second choice. As Sadan (1997) further explained, self-efficacy may become collective efficacy if it is translated into the community's practical ability to organize itself for a collective effort to achieve outcomes in the environment. Women need to have the confidence to show their ability and control their motivation and behavior necessary to give the best performance.

Furthermore, the sixth point on Sadan's (1997) intended outcomes in the empowerment process is that success in mobilizing resources to continue the process is the outcome that indicates the process has been established. This is an ongoing process at Rara Asmoro. All the members are still developing their ability to control their lives, participate in decision-making, and reach their big vision: to influence other women that in *wayang kulit* art, women can dream high and have many opportunities to develop their potential for a happier and more successful life.

CONCLUSIONS

Rara Asmoro, an all-women *karawitan* community, is characterized by a strong sense of connection, empathy, and support among its members. It has developed close-knit relationships where individuals care for and help one another. This culture may be characterized by a nurturing and collaborative environment, focusing on mutual growth, shared values, and shared responsibility with the objective of supporting women's empowerment. Rara Asmoro fosters creativity, trust, and loyalty among the members, leading to a sense of belonging and overall satisfaction within the community. This environment encourages the members to explore their artistic potential and builds confidence in their abilities.

Through Rara Asmoro's mission for women empowerment, not only can the community impact the present but also inspire and empower future generations of women artists in *Wayang Kulit*. Rara Asmoro can encourage girls and young women to pursue their artistic passions, providing them with role models and a supportive community to thrive within the *wayang* world.

The theoretical recommendation of the research is to enrich the organizational culture studies, which in Javanese art and culture organization, the dynamics within the members, especially all-women community, may be different than formal organizations. *Wayang* or

karawitan communities have different approaches to developing their organizational culture, where profits and aggressiveness are not always the main priority. Meanwhile, the results of the research can provide valuable recommendations to professionals, leaders in traditional art communities, educators and researchers as well.

Practical programs or training for art troupes can be improved by applying more artistic and performance skills in traditional art, specifically in *wayang kulit* performances; educators can use the results for teaching materials and discussion, and researchers may use the findings for further research on women's empowerment. The research has limitations in terms of its findings as the research is conducted for only six months (February-July 2023). With the limited time, further advances within the community will not be captured and analyzed while Rara Asmoro is still growing and active in the *wayang kulit* world. This brings the recommendations to continue the research for a longer period of time and expand the research to include *karawitan* and *wayang* communities in other cities in Central and East Java.

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